New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 18 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 10, 1947

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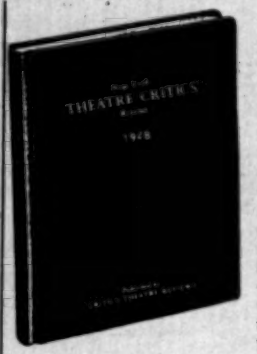

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"The First Mrs. Fraser"

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 6, 1947

'The First Mrs. Fraser' Has Wit and Warmth

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The First Mrs. Fraser," after a life of nearly 20 years, turns out to be still a play of such warmth, wit and humanity as few of its younger competitors can rival.

It is a splendid vehicle for Jane Cowl, but beyond that gets fine performances from Henry Daniell, her co-star, Reginald Mason, and the younger members of the cast.

This is a mellow and leisurely tale, beautifully put together with a subtle impetus. Its wisdom is usually passive, to be savored, while it winds its characters to an utterly satisfying conclusion.

St. John Ervine has taken Mrs. Fraser, a pleasant woman in common enough circumstances, and placed her in a believable but startling situation. The mother of two grown sons, she has been divorced by her husband, who now wants her help in getting rid of his flibbertigibbet of a second wife.

Entertains Two Rivals.

Chance lets her accomplish this in her own sweet way, and she suddenly finds herself blossoming out of her lonely maturity as she entertains two rivals for her love.

Mrs. Fraser is a not too distant relative of Maggie Wylie of "What Every Woman Knows." Like Maggie she works behind the scenes, and is taken for granted. And like Maggie she is deeply in love with the vain and humorless Scotsman whom she married.

Mrs. Fraser is inclined to lead other people on rather than to talk frequently herself, and when she does speak she is generally to the point. That the part is skillfully written to let action spring from her, is not alone enough to make the role dominate the play. It has to be as skillfully acted, every minute.

Never one to be afraid of a telling gesture, Miss Cowl makes Mrs. Fraser a clear sympathetic figure whom you pull for all along the way.

Authoritative Words.

At first she has the civilized charm of a woman with the taste to hide her emotions and see the humorous side of the irregular situation in which she is placed. As her responsibility grows, she speaks with delicate hesitation, choosing her words with great care.

When everyone seems to take her finesse and herself for granted, she belays them with a fine flow of authoritative words and only then cuts loose in a good old feminine, self pitying cry.

It is a role that, like the play, gathers steam and variety as it goes along. Miss Cowl knows exactly where it is going and is eminently effective.

Henry Daniell does a fine job as the obtuse Mr. Fraser. He makes his lack of humor highly amusing and projects his egocentric bombast without yelling.

As the faithful beau who loves Mrs. Fraser but also loves fishing, Reginald Mason is delightfully persistent, and Frances Tannehill is brassily glib as the tartish second Mrs. F.

Kendall Clark is very good as a smug chip off the old block, and Lex Richards is a fiery young cynic. Emily Lawrence has little to do beyond looking handsome, which she does uncommonly well.

"The First Mrs. Fraser" never makes you catch your breath or gag with laughter. Better than that it never lets you stop smiling, nor stops warming your heart.

'THE FIRST MRS. FRASER.'

Play by St. John Ervine; directed by Harold Young; setting by Charles Elson; costumes by Natalie Barth Walker; presented by Gant Gaither at the Shubert Theater, Wednesday evening, November 5, 1947. The cast:

Nialan Fraser ..... Lex Richards
Mabel ..... Hazel Jones
James Fraser ..... Henry Daniell
Phillip Logan ..... Reginald Mason
Alice Fraser ..... Emily Lawrence
Murdo Fraser ..... Kendall Clark
Janet Fraser ..... Jane Cowl
Elsie Fraser ..... Frances Tannehill

SYNOPSIS—The action of the play takes place in Janet Fraser's apartment in Knightsbridge, London. The time is the present. Act I—Late afternoon. Act II—Two weeks later. Act III—Six months later.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 6, 1947

Jane Cowl Returns in a Fairish Revival of 'The First Mrs. Fraser'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Any play which serves to bring Jane Cowl back to the stage could not be unwelcome, and her appearance at the Shubert last evening in a revival of "The First Mrs. Fraser" was an occasion for affectionate greeting. But I can't help wishing—too late, of course, and helplessly—that something new and delightful had been provided for so luminous a lady.

St. John Ervine's comedy of marriage now is 18 years old. Considering that it is not a classic and was not designed as one, the play carries its age gracefully enough, being parlor talk in the British tradition. It is urbane, and it has a touch of maliciousness in its humor.

But, last evening, I was now and again disturbed by feeling that it was being played for more than it was worth—that a lighter, more offhand performance would have helped. Its first performance in the 1929-1930 season (by Grace George, A. E. Matthews and Lawrence Grossmith) was, to my most careful recollection, gayer in tone and an affair of considerable style.

In Three Styles.

The revival seems to have, not one essential style, but three, — though its principals could not agree on just how amusing Mr. Ervine intended things to be. Miss Cowl performs in the Cowl fashion, with the familiar gestures, the little repetitions, and the frequent laughing through the end of a line whether it is particularly funny or not.

Henry Daniell, as the first Mrs. Fraser's ex-husband, plays in what may be regarded as the Daniell style, which is a very direct attack upon the matter in hand. Since James Fraser, as a character, is a little on the stuffy side, Mr. Daniell plays him stuffily. He permits the audience to be amused at Fraser—but he himself does not seem to be.

Mr. Mason Successful.

Of the three principals, I think Reginald Mason, as Mrs. Fraser's eternal suitor, has the best idea of how things should go. He has the deft, light approach to the comedy, and is a very skillful player.

"The First Mrs. Fraser" tells of a woman who has been divorced after twenty years of marriage—divorced against her will so that her husband may marry something a good deal younger. After five years with the new wife, who is a bit of a trollop, Mr. Fraser yearns for a resumption of the status quo. The first Mrs. Fraser neatly maneuvers the second Mrs. F. out of the running. There are no surprises in Mr. Ervine's plot, and there never were; just an evening's discussion of the well known marriage relationship.

Frances Tannehill plays the second Mrs. Fraser with commendable candor, and the others of the company are helpful when needed. Charles Elson's setting of a London sitting-room is attractive.

"The First Mrs. Fraser"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 6, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Museum Piece

SEVERAL excellent performances fail to lubricate the stiff joints of "The First Mrs. Fraser" in its current revival at the Shubert Theater. The St. John Ervine play, something of a hit eighteen years ago, is a mannerly and mannered show. It is extremely dated. Compared in its original production with the polite drawing-room comedies of Pinero and his colleagues in the '90s, the work has grown even more archaic and laggard with the passage of time. Jane Cowl floods certain scenes with warmth and eloquence by her sheer artistry, while Henry Daniell and the supporting company make the piece flicker dramatically on occasion, but their efforts do not result in a very rewarding resurrection.

* * *

Ervine was celebrating the amusing aspects of divorce in "The First Mrs. Fraser," with a secondary theme burlesquing the efforts of youngsters to arrange the destinies of their elders. Many of his lines remain apt and witty, in a quiet sort of way and one or two situations almost reach the level of theatrical excitement. But in the present Gant Gaither offering there is a notable lack of impetus and cohesion in the action. When Miss Cowl is talking about growing old in the title role, or trapping her vixenish successor, there is some clew to the earlier success of the comedy. It is faint.

* * *

What is chiefly lacking in the revival is an underlying emotional pull which might have made it appealing as well as mildly amusing. The chances are that Ervine never achieved this in the first place.

Under Harold Young's direction, it is almost never apparent. Certainly the fable of a cast-off wife, arranging for her former husband's freedom from a second marital bondage in the midst of conflicting advice from her sons and a devoted old suitor, should have pertinence today as well as in 1929, but this one has little or none.

* * *

Miss Cowl is a steady star throughout the proceedings. With her rich voice and the simple authority of her gestures, she is equally good when she is giving the second Mrs. Fraser the works, chiding her meddling children, or resigning herself to being wooed all over again by her vain Scotch ex-husband. Daniell is properly irascible and thick-witted as the last-named character, and Frances Tannehill is gaudily predatory as the young new wife. Meanwhile Reginald Mason and the others contribute solid enough portrayals of rather two-dimensional roles. "The First Mrs. Fraser" just hasn't got the vitality to stand being pulled off a library shelf.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 6, 1947

Jane Cowl Is Starred In Ervine Revival

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

It is pleasant to have Jane Cowl back in the theatre after such a lamentably long absence, but I am afraid that I cannot be equally hospitable to St. John Ervine's comedy, "The First Mrs. Fraser," which was revived at the Shubert last night. When "The First Mrs. Fraser" was originally presented in New York eighteen years ago, I was under the impression that it then seemed at least eighteen years old. It hasn't grown any fresher with the passage of time, but it appears to me that it has become a little longer.

Mr. Ervine, a crochety and cantankerous fellow even for an Ulsterman, has long been carrying on a feud with youth, and this play about the understanding matron who won her fatuous husband back from his faithless snip of a second wife was one of the minor weapons in his campaign against the young. There might have been something ironically entertaining in the fact that the younger generation in which the playwright found most of the evils of contemporary civilization has meanwhile become the older generation which he saw as its finest product, but I'm afraid that this chastening thought doesn't help the comedy much.

There really isn't anything particularly wrong with "The First Mrs. Fraser." It tells its story of the older wife's triumph pleasantly enough, and, despite the ferocity of the now almost forgotten critic-dramatist's views on the young and virtually everything else, its mood is amiable and friendly. You could never tell from it that Mr. Ervine was usually in a rage. The one trouble is that the play is mild, commonplace and a little dull.

It is a shame, because Miss Cowl is a vital and interesting actress, with a fine sense of the theatre about her. The conquer-

actress, with a fine sense of the theatre about her. The conquering Mrs. Fraser isn't one of her best parts, since this sort of tolerant, wise, humorous and compassionate heroine has become such a stock character of parlor comedy that it requires far more graceful writing than Mr. Ervine could provide to give it life. But Miss Cowl acts it with humor and zest, reminding us once more that she is one of the great women of the American stage.

The Conventions

If the role Miss Cowl plays is based on one of the most familiar conventions of the English drama the same can assuredly be said of the other parts. The dull ex-husband, played by Henry Daniell, is the usual type of amiable, boastful imbecile, unaware of the fact that his wife is running his life, that Barrie made unbearable as early as in "What Every Woman Knows," and the loyal, unwanted, lifelong suitor of the heroine, portrayed by Reginald Mason, is not only an ancient theatrical bore, but a particularly fatuous one.

The lesser characters have little life in them, save for the disagreeable second wife, who has at least the touch of vitality that the author's hearty dislike for her type gave her. The part is managed with agreeable liveliness by Frances Tannehill. If you are interested in such historical matters, Miss Tannehill's role was first acted here by Carol Goodner, while Grace George, A. E. Matthews and Lawrence Grossmith, respectively, had the roles currently managed by Miss Cowl, Mr. Daniell and Mr. Mason.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 6, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

'Mrs. Fraser' Fades a Bit.

The rule in the New York theater of the moment seems to be this: If you can't find a good new play, revive an old one. So Gant Gaither exhumes "The First Mrs. Fraser" for Jane Cowl, who toured successfully the showshops of the Eastern countryside with it during the past summer.

St. John Ervine's comedy of 1929, as revealed last evening at the Shubert, is now a play of many infirmities. It was always a comedy of stock situations, plus conversational urbanities, and the time elapse of eighteen years has had the effect of making it somewhat quaint. And Ervine's blasting away against youth isn't very amusing now, and doesn't seem to matter.

"The First Mrs. Fraser" again brings before us the spectacle of the divorced Mr. Fraser coming to his first wife for her advice, her wisdom and understanding, when he learns that his second wife wants to be rid of him to marry a title. And there is the third act situation when the erring and penitent Scotsman, done with the second Mrs. Fraser, seeks remarriage with the companion of his earlier years. The debate as to whether she will take him or won't now goes on interminably.

Jane Cowl, whose appearances in our theater are far too infrequent, plays the first and nobler Mrs. Fraser, subtly, archly, artfully and with all of her abundant charm, taking over the role that was Grace George's in the original production. Henry Daniell uses a Scotch accent, which he discards occasionally, in his rather broad characterization of the stubborn James Fraser.

Reginald Mason, playing the futile Philip, grown accustomed to Mrs. Fraser's rejections, brings a lot of theatrical experience and an amusing display of dignity to his performance. Frances Tannehill has considerable gusto as the hard, shallow, five-letter Elsie. Lex Richards and Kendall Clark are the sons who remain loyal to their mother. A lush, realistic setting has been provided by Charles Elson. Harold Young has directed.

"The First Mrs. Fraser," hailed as a brilliant conversation piece in 1929, has faded quite a bit. It isn't very stimulating in this early November of 1947.

PM EXCLUSIVE

NOVEMBER 7, 1947

Kronenberger

A Thin Little Comedy Is Tediously Revived

The main trouble with *The First Mrs. Fraser* after 18 years is that it is just isn't very interesting. It's urbanely enough written. It's competently enough put together. It knows its way not only round a stage but round a drawing-room. And it's concerned with perfectly good—in fact with more or less staple—subjects for polite comedy: with the difference between two generations, between two sexes, between two wives.

• • •

Yet the fact remains that it's scarcely any fun; and I suppose there's really nothing odd about the fact. For, after all, the virtues named above are pretty negative virtues—the sort of things without which a polite comedy wouldn't just fail to succeed, but actually couldn't begin to exist. Such virtues prove that *The First Mrs. Fraser* is a very tidy play, but not for a moment that it's a very talented one. And it's not a very talented one. Its talent is genuine, but painfully thin; its effect is legitimate, but terribly mild. Furthermore, nearly all the people in the play except Mrs. Fraser are deadly bores; not only is the title-role a vehicle for whoever plays it, but it makes everybody else trudge along wearily on foot.

• • •

And no doubt at this remove the play also seems rather dated. For any traditional play that seems dull when it is revived is apt to seem dated too; it is only liveliness and sparkle that ever saves the highly traditional from degenerating into the merely old-fashioned. But in one respect *Mrs. Fraser* is, perhaps, peculiarly dated. In 1929 which was the heyday of youthful rebelliousness and unconventionality—the emphasis that Mr. Ervine put on the middle-aged virtues may have been spectacular in its very stuffiness, may have given the play a kind of fillip-in-reverse. If it did, that fillip has certainly vanished. Today, Mr. Ervine's young people only seem too crudely handled, too close to caricature.

• • •

And yet, having blamed the dullness of *Mrs. Fraser* on the play itself, I'm not sure that a fair amount of the fault doesn't lie in the production. I'm not sure that, done with real style and quickness and lightness, *The First Mrs. Fraser* mightn't, in an unexciting way, have passed muster. Perhaps not—but the fact remains that it wasn't done with real style and quickness and lightness. In the title role Jane Cowl was vivacious as always; but Miss Cowl's mannerisms somehow slow down a play more than they build up a part. And if the warm and winning first Mrs. Fraser—who sufficiently triumphs over the second Mrs. Fraser to emerge as the third Mrs. Fraser—lets you down even a little, where is your evening? Henry Daniell played Fraser manfully, but for the bore he is. Reginald Mason played Philip Logan gracefully—but for the bore *he* is. All the young people's parts were acted inadequately; and Harold Young's direction played up all the points that should have been slurred over as old hat. *The First Mrs. Fraser* isn't my idea of gaiety. But it needn't be as dull as it was on Wednesday night.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Journal American

NOVEMBER 6, 1947

Revival Mistakenly Brought Up-to-Date

By ROBERT GARLAND

The reason for reviving St. John Ervine's "The First Mrs. Fraser" is not immediately apparent at the Sam S. Shubert Theatre. But revive it Gant Gaither has, with Jane Cowl and Henry Daniell in the Grace George and A. E. Matthews roles, with Frances Tannehill and Reginald Mason taking over for Carol Goodner and Lawrence Grossmith.

By moving the London critic's comedy up from 1929 to the present day, the producer has done neither the playwright nor the players an effective favor. In contemporary dress, "The First Mrs. Fraser" is, I fancy, considerably more dated than it might have been in the costumes of the pre-atomic age when the Graf Zeppelin's flight was news.

You can't, it seems, contemporize a fairly modern play. Arthur Hopkins failed to turn the trick when he up-to-dated Arthur Wing Pinero's "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" with Ethel Barrymore and last night's Henry Daniell in the leading roles. Gant Gaither now fares no better with St. John Ervine's "The First Mrs. Fraser," co-starring Jane Cowl and Mr. Daniell.

The world of 1929 is a century—two, maybe—away. Or so it seems alongside the Messrs. Shubert's Alley.

• • •

On Irritating Side

In "The First Mrs. Fraser," St. John Ervine, who always manages to be sore about something, is sore about the modern generation. The modern generation of 18 years ago, that is. It's greedy. It's mean. It's horribly cruel. It thinks of nothing but luxury and easy life and what it calls fun. It doesn't care whose feelings it hurts. Or how.

Well, this may have been true of the modern generation of 1929. But it's an old man's lie about the modern generation of 1947. And 1947 is the period against which Mr. Ervine, using the first Mrs. Fraser as his mouthpiece, is supposed to rail. It's like railing against the Black Bottom, which has been changed to the Samba at the Shubert.

In other words, whatever raison d'etre "The First Mrs. Fraser" may have had as a comedy of manners as of 1929 has been thoroughly dissipated by the mistaken attempt to remodel it into a comedy of manners as of today. Janet, her positivistic husband and her bumptious sons, are as outmoded as the revised vehicle in which they anachronistically appear.

Even if they were better acted than they are, Mr. Ervine's Knightsbridge Londoners would be on the irritating side nowadays.

Unhappy Hangover

But they aren't better acted at the Shubert. Under the direction of a newcomer, whose name is Harold Young, Jane Cowl and Henry Daniell, Frances Tannehill and Reginald Mason, indulge themselves in performances that are in need of editing. A directorial blue pencil, hard-heartedly applied, would be of help to the actorial goings-on in the St. John Ervine revival.

In unbecoming clothes by Henri Bendall, Miss Cowl's Janet Fraser is an unhappy hangover from the between wars London, when George V was King. Yet, if you'll believe the programs in the audience and the references on the stage, she is an atomic-minded Londoner in the Knightsbridge of right now.

The first and only Mr. Fraser of Henry Daniell is scarcely more contemporary. Nor is he more believable than the Scotch accent with which he is endowed. As the Fraser's oh-so-English offspring—Ninian and Murdo by names—Lex Richards and Kendall Clark are indeed cheerio. And Frances Tannehill's second Mrs. Fraser must be seen to be depreciated...

It was a mistake to bring "The Second Mrs. Fraser" up to date. As a matter of fact, it was a mistake to bring it up at all.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

F. Hugh Herbert's Comedy, 'For Love or Money,' Brings June Lockhart to Henry Miller's Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Beginning with a funeral, F. Hugh Herbert makes his way one step at a time through quite an assembly of stock situations in "For Love or Money," which was acted at Henry Miller's last evening. Possibly he has been studying too many bad movies. For no one would contrive quite so mirthless a basic situation and work at it quite so confidently without having apprenticed himself to a hokum factory. In extremis Mr. Herbert can write a funny line after hammering together an elaborate platform to display it on. But his labor is lost in the long mechanical stretches of "For Love or Money," which argues a misspent life in the studio library.

* * *

For one entire week Preston Mitchell, a celebrated actor, and Janet Blake, a very charming vagrant, live under the same roof without breaking any of the commandments. This is Mr. Herbert's basic situation. Possibly it is piquant or titillating; possibly it is heroic or astonishing. At any rate, Mr. Herbert places a high dramatic value on it, for he pushes at it from every angle all through the evening. Since it puts Mitchell and Janet at cross-purposes with everyone in the cast as well as each other, it is certainly a tiresome situation that breeds a lot of venomous talk. Where sex is concerned Mr. Herbert likes to have his morality and enjoy his sin, too. That is strictly a professional attitude—safe but boring.

At any rate, it keeps the actors working. Inside a gaudy living-room, designed out of some mass-production catalogue by Raymond Sovey, Harry Ellerbe has directed an arduous performance. John Loder plays the gallant actor with elementary humor. As a brilliantly cynical actress, Vicki Cummings gives an accomplished performance. Grover Burgess contributes the laconical man-servant, and Maida Reade the maternal housekeeper. Mark O'Daniels is the shiftless suitor from next door; and Paula Trueman and Kirk Brown take care of his bourgeois parents.

* * *

But the only fresh idea in the evening is the presence of June Lockhart as Janet. She is the daughter of Gene and Kathleen Lockhart, which shows that her taste is discriminating. She is enchanting, and, except for a mechanical laugh, she acts with style. She should be kept under surveillance on Broadway to prevent her from returning to Hollywood and acting in movies indistinguishable from "For Love or Money."

The Sun

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Feeble Comedy, Bright Ingenue.

F. Hugh Herbert, the man who wrote "Kiss and Tell," which was played all the way from here to the Malay archipelago, now contributes "For Love or Money," a feeble and frequently wavering comedy that is brightened considerably by the presence of a young actress, June Lockhart, who is new to Broadway. She is delightful. The first performance was given last night at Henry Miller's.

There are no hallucinations to contend with in "For Love or Money." It's just an unpretending, workmanlike little play that has some nice moments, but not enough of them. Some good dialogue, but not enough of it.

Playwright Herbert's comedy is of the "Daddy Long Legs" school; the man for whom its theater is named used to know all about that. The new play presents its story of the love of a girl in her twenties for a man in his forties. It's a romance that turns out pleasantly, with the famous actor, who is nearing a calamitous middle age winning out over a younger and more impetuous competitor.

June Lockhart, making her Broadway debut, has spirit and poise; she is never coy or cute. She has an excellent sense of comedy and when the author gives her a scene to play, as he does in the first act when she comes hurtling in out of a thunderstorm, she plays it with great charm and skill.

John Loder is forceful and competent as the maturing matinee idol. Vicki Cummings, who got good training in "The Voice of the Turtle," brings a sharp delivery and first-rate timing to the role of the poisonous and possessive Mrs. Havemeyer, who has been the hero's mistress. Mark O'Daniels is an agreeable actor and Grover Burgess and Maida Reade are helpfully around as servants of the household.

Burgess has the kind of part that belonged exclusively to Percy Kilbride before that actor turned to the films. Harry Ellerbe has directed and Raymond Sovey has supplied the setting.

"For Love or Money," presented by Barnard Straus, is never painfully tedious, but it isn't quite good enough. It never achieves the entertainment values of the "Dear Ruth" category. And F. Hugh Herbert wrote a better comedy in "Kiss and Tell."

Daily Mirror

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

'Love or Money' Doesn't Register

By ROBERT COLEMAN

F. Hugh Herbert's comedy, "Kiss and Tell," was a big hit. But "For Love or Money," his latest, which Barnard Straus brought to Henry Miller's Theatre last evening, looms as a little miss.

Herbert is interested this time in an aging actor, who lives in a palatial house in Port Washington. As the curtain rises, he is being consoled on the death of his wife after 10 years of illness. To the world the actor has been a devoted husband. But inwardly he has been bitter, because his wife got her injuries trying to run off with another guy. He had nobly covered up her misdemeanors.

On the night of the funeral, a pretty young dentist's assistant comes galloping into his house, drenched by rain and frightened because a boy had tried to kiss her on the way home from a party.

The lonely actor proceeds to make her his ward and install her in his house. His co-star becomes jealous and tries to eliminate the interloper and his godson proves to be the cause of the ward's distress.

The actor sets the idea that the ward is in love with the godson, and it makes him kinda miserable. But she is really in love with her patron, and it makes him very happy and provides a situation on which to ring down the curtain.

Like most of the characters in the comedy, the dialogue is not very bright. Author Herbert attributes some of the worst cliches to vehicles in which the actor had appeared. And the laughs come at infrequent intervals and are not calculated to fracture your ribs.

Harry Ellerbe's direction is as pedestrian as Herbert's play.

John Loder, Vicki Cummings, June Lockhart, Mark O'Daniels, Paula Trueman, Maida Reade and Grover Burgess labor valiantly, if unprofitably, in the leads.

Miss Lockhart is the attractive daughter of Gene and Kathleen Lockhart. Though she has appeared in several films, this marks her debut on the New York stage. June is a double for Virginia Gilmore. If anyone has a script calling for twins, June and Virginia could fill the bill.

Herbert probably wrote the newcomer for love and we doubt it will make any money for producer Straus.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

June Lockhart's Gold

F. HUGH HERBERT squeezes considerable laughter out of a conventional farcical situation in "For Love or Money." His new comedy at Henry Miller's Theater is highly contrived as it introduces a supposedly naive waif into the Port Washington home of a veteran actor and has her tangle with his sharp-tongued mistress and an amorous godson. The dialogue is sometimes funny; it is never witty. Without the agile capers of the scintillating June Lockhart, and the broad portrayals of a couple of acting folk by John Loder and Vicki Cummings, it would be thin stuff indeed. As a play, it is still thin, but its beguiling moments are neatly packaged.

* * *

Miss Lockhart is the chief source of delight in a slick show. Making her Broadway debut in the comedy, she is brash, artful and altogether captivating. When the author's cut-to-pattern inspiration falters, as it frequently does, she is generally on hand to give a bit of stage business buoyancy by her very presence or endow a commonplace verbal battle with fetching satirical overtones. Since she is most easy to look at, she even dominates the proceedings when she is an innocent and mute bystander. She has started her local stage career right up there at the top.

* * *

When "For Love or Money" is angling craftily for a curtain, it receives no little propulsion from its chief players. Loder, after a long period of servitude to the cinema, is perfectly at home in the theater, playing the baffled middle-aged actor, who mistakes his protege's love for gratitude, with properly heavy emphasis. His consternation when she drops a hat as a not too gentle hint that she wants to be wooed, or his chagrin at finding that his efforts to send her off to a younger swain are considered ham acting, are projected with a maximum of theatrical effect.

* * *

Miss Cummings joins him admirably in realizing the burlesque of actors's private lives which the author has incorporated in his pot-pourri. She is splendidly bitchy as the leading woman, who tries to ridicule the girl who came in out of the rain to her own discomfiture. Mark O'Daniels, in the part of the godson, has a nebulous role and plays it gingerly, but Grover Burgess gets in some good comic licks as a close-mouthed handyman. All in all, "For Love or Money" is a moderately entertaining piece of material fluff, given special appeal by the participation of the lovely and knowing Miss Lockhart.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

Work of Young Actress Aids Tepid Comedy

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The only pleasant news of last night's proceedings at Henry Miller's Theatre was the arrival from Hollywood of a young screen actress named June Lockhart. To one of the leading roles of the new play by F. Hugh Herbert, called "For Love or Money," Miss Lockhart brought freshness, bright prettiness, an unaffected gayety of spirit and a beguiling sense of romantic comedy, and she was so enchanting about it that there were moments when she almost led one to the belief that her vehicle possessed similar qualities. I can assure you, however, that it doesn't.

Mr. Herbert, who was the author of the successful "Kiss and Tell," may conceivably have heard of the old comedy called "David Garrick" before he wrote "For Love or Money." If you remember your theatrical history with some thoroughness you will recall that "David Garrick" was about the infatuation of a young girl for a famous actor, and how the great thespian put on a scene making himself disgusting, so that he could disillusion her. Being a modern and "sophisticated" playwright, though Mr. Herbert has shifted things a bit.

Middle-Aged Hero

In his version, the actor goes through with his scene intended to destroy the girl's love, but, being an up-to-date young woman, she isn't fooled for a moment and knows that he is only pretending. This makes it possible to arrange one of those endings in which the aging hero gets the youthful ingenue, a conclusion which seems to delight the souls of playwrights who are themselves approaching middle years. Scenario writers, understandably fed up with the triumph of male youth on the screen, are particularly tempted by this sort of happy ending when they write for the theatre.

Despite the blandishments of Miss Lockhart, an aging drama critic can see that, in the case of "For Love or Money," the romance is mechanical and commonplace. Mr. Herbert, it appears, is a kind of lesser Norman Krasna, with all of Krasna's propensity for fabricated comedy, but without his gift for making the manufactured products slick and expert. There seemed to me a minimum of skill in the new work.

Not Too Pleasant

It is my impression, too, that, in addition to being dull, "For Love or Money" is a trifle unpleasant as a comedy. The love of the girl for the debonair stage veteran is by no means as delightful as the author believes, and the additional detail that the hero's wife has just died after ten years of being an invalid, with the climactic revelation that she had been unfaithful to her husband, didn't, I thought, add to the play's charm.

As I seem to have hinted, the acting honors go entirely to Miss Lockhart. John Loder, also from the movies, manages the role of the eminent actor who is always using lines from his old plays, inoffensively but with no particular distinction. Vicki Cummings in the customary part of the sardonic castoff sweetheart, does what is expected of her, and Mark O'Daniels is pleasant as the young man who loses out to the actor. But "For Love or Money" is Miss Dockhart's play, and she deserves a better one.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

'For Love or Money' Meanders Pleasantly

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"For Love or Money" is an unruffling little play which wanders along familiar paths without trying either to stir anyone into a great passion, or to be particularly funny.

The play carefully skirts its serious themes and sets a casual mood which could not be called comic any more than it could be taken seriously.

The chief thing the play does is to introduce June Lockhart as an immensely tasteful, assured young actress who behaves, as she has every right to, as if she had been brought up in the theater.

The play itself is a younger, less brittle and more pallid "Accent on Youth." The leading figure is a handsome middle aged theatrical star who has just lost his wife after a decade's invalidism.

Breath of Youth.

Into his house and his life comes a fresh youngster, a dentist's assistant with no ties and less understanding of his sophistication. She is a breeze over the murky hypocrisy of his life, and he keeps her, officially as his secretary, and quite morally otherwise.

This arrangement does not suit his mistress who is also his leading lady, nor does it please his neighboring godson who is in love with the girl.

The rest of the play develops these quite obvious conflicts by quite obvious methods. There are various misunderstandings, and a number of jokes about the girl's complete ignorance of the actor's famous friends.

Egged On by Mistress.

The girl changes her mind about all men being lecherous and begins to find the actor attractive if transparent. There is a scene of candid sarcasm between the girl and the actress, and a scene of jealousy between the two men.

Finally there is a scene where the actor, egged on by his mistress, tries to convince the girl that he dislikes her, with fairly obvious results.

There is no particular wit in all this, and the construction of the play smacks of a chain plot of a radio serial. Yet pleasant performances and a lack of pretentiousness give "For Love or Money" a relaxed appeal.

The attractive Miss Lockhart has a gift for seeming completely and calmly natural. She also has a healthy way of thinking and listening, instead of just trying to look as if she were attentive.

John Loder makes a handsomely pleasing character of the somewhat stuffy actor, a role which cannot be overly gratifying.

Vicki Cummings lends a fine figure and husky voice to the part of the actress with all the answers, and Mark O'Daniels is the stalwart rival for Miss Lockhart's hand.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

'For Love or Money' Is a Formula Comedy About Sex Among Actors

By JOHN CHAPMAN

F. Hugh Herbert, secretary of the Screen Writers Guild, filed an affidavit last evening that he is not a Communist. He filed it at Henry Miller's Theatre. The document, in dialogue form, was titled "For Love or Money." It revealed that Secretary Herbert is a normal American screenwriter who believes in Pure Love, no matter how impure he has made the circumstances look. If this is subversive, so was the late Avery Hopwood.

Mr. Herbert is a man for a funny line and a sexy situation. His earlier comedy, "Kiss and Tell," was quite a hit. A piece he wrote recently for his union's house organ, The Screenwriter, burlesquing the development of a movie production, was first-class satire. His new play, "For Love or Money," is a little less than first class, being a formula job, but it is good-natured and nicely presented. I found it reasonably if not quite sufficiently amusing.

The formula is one that I will leave to that great documentarian, George Nathan, to trace back to an early source. It's the one about the innocent girl who comes out of a rainstorm into the house of a dashing old sophisticate. Instead of being seduced, or, worse, violated, she is treated most considerately and correctly, and is allowed to remain as a secretary.

Enough Is Enough

Naturally a couple of acts of this stuff burns her up, so in the third act she breaks down the gentlemanly reserve of her benefactor and is, at closing time, headed for a life of poisonous bliss.

Paragraph A in Mr. Herbert's affidavit is June Lockhart, who plays with convincing charm the role of a dentist's assistant who never heard of Frank Fay or anybody else connected with the stage. Hers is the first case I have yet encountered which indicates that Fay is slipping.

Paragraph B is John Loder, acting a sophisticated actor who somehow still possesses an admirable instinct for chivalry. Mr. Loder takes this hurdle as if it were nothing at all. He gives Miss Lockhart an old beach robe to wear for a couple of acts while her dinner dress (by Eaves) is drying out, and he puts her in the guest room, and he lets a young neighbor lad make love to her, and he behaves like a perfect gentleman.

Affable Company.

Paragraph C is Vicki Cummings, in the role of a sophisticated actress who has had her fun with Mr. Loder, both on and off stage, and who wants to have more fun off. She loses, of course, to Miss Lockhart (to win would have been subversive) and she looks very handsome (the program says "Miss Cumming's outfit is by Hattie Carnegie").

Mr. Herbert's innuendos are familiar, harmless and, a couple of times, quite funny. Harry Ellerbe has staged the comedy acceptably, and Mark O'Daniels, Paula Trueman and the others of the company are entirely affable. Raymond Sovey's setting of a Long Island house (where else could a play like this be set?) looks just like a pretty good house, worth maybe $45,000 in the present real estate market.

If anybody down in Washington wants it, I'll be glad to send my endorsement of F. Hugh Herbert as secretary of the Screen Writers Guild.

"This Time Tomorrow"

Journal American

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

A Lot of Cloudiness And Mumbo-Jumbo

By ROBERT GARLAND

As far as I can gather, Dutch playwright Jan de Hartog is giving humanity the back of his hand in "This Time Tomorrow." But, owing to the murkiness in which the proceedings are enveloped, I was unfortunately unable to indulge in a great amount of gathering last evening at the Ethel Barrymore.

Heaven knows, I stayed awake and tried.

At any rate, the back of Jan de Hartog's hand hurts humanity more than it hurts him. It obviously hurt the majority of the Theatre Guilders foregathered dutifully on 47th st. But, cooperating along with me, they did their best to appreciate the Dutchman's all-for-their-own-good chastisement.

The Theatre Guild has its subscribers trained.

But it takes something more than training to make an audience sit still and appreciate two acts and seven scenes of mumbo-jumbo composed of odds and ends of realism, mysticism and symbolism, tuberculosis, hallucination and prophecy, with an overdose of nympholepsy thrown in to make the appreciation difficult...

The going's tough at the Ethel Barrymore.

• • •

Pseudo Problem

This pseudo-problem play is the one the Lawrence Langners tested last summer in their Westport Country Playhouse. There it was called "Death of a Rat," under which title London has also seen it. I can't tell you how West End theatregoers received it. Westport theatregoers didn't!

Last night, Broadway didn't receive it, either.

Instead, they met its warm and worried heroine, its confused and cavalierish hero, its fussy and forgetful professor and its made-to-order god from the machine, with polite incredulity. Almost audibly they told themselves that there must be more in "This Time Tomorrow" than meets the ear and eye.

To tell you the truth, there isn't!

Instead, there's the highbrow-lowbrow hokum-pokum of a doctor who works on rats, a robot who is his helper, a bearded busybody who—when he remembers it—is on the lookout for a cure for cancer and a lady known as Yolan who is technically dead but actually alive and ticking. Ticking for the doctor....

Frankly, it's a bloodless, unpalatable foursome.

• • •

Takes Up TB

This time, Ruth Ford has gotten rid of her odd "No Exit" ailment and taken up tuberculosis. So, following a lamentable logic known only to make-believe physicians, the admirer called Dr. Wilts—and doesn't he, though!—takes her to live with the bearded busybody whose specialty is cancer.

Miss Ford is consistently implausible.

Sam Jaffe, whose downtown "King Lear" is to be remembered along with his uptown "Thank You, Svoboda," is as good as anyone could be as the bearded busybody with a would-be funny forgetfulness. In the Dutchman's drama he is called upon to do everything but sing. He meets the challenge like an actor.

The rat-minded young medico is John Archer.

Mr. Archer is a Broadway graduate of "One Man Show," "The Day Before Spring" and "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley," and a Hollywood associate of Turhan Bey, Jack Carson and Gig Young. At the Ethel Barrymore he wears a becoming pipe and does what little director Paul Crabtree tells him. It isn't too professional...

Like Yolan, its unhappy heroine, "This Time Tomorrow" is dead on its feet and doesn't seem to know it.

'THIS TIME TOMORROW.'

Play by Jan de Hartog; directed by Paul Crabtree; production under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner; settings by Herbert Brodkin; costumes by Patricia Montgomery; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Ethel Barrymore Theater Monday evening, November 3, 1947. The cast:

Wilts	John Archer
Karola	Tyler Carpenter
Yolan	Ruth Ford
Wouterson	Sam Jaffe

SYNOPSIS—Act I: Scene 1, a dissecting room in the Amsterdam Institute of Scientific Research, prior to the Nazi invasion; Scene 2, the deck of a ferryboat on the Zuyder Zee, prior to the Spanish Civil War; Scene 3, a room in Dr. Wouterson's house, Amsterdam, some weeks later. Act II: Scene 1, the dissecting room; Scene 2, a room in Dr. Wouterson's house; Scene 3, the same, one week later; Scene 4, the dissecting room.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Rather Confusing

"THIS TIME TOMORROW," at the Ethel Barrymore, is a gloomy and cluttered consideration of metaphysics, cancer research, the rumblings of war, love and tuberculosis. Jan de Hartog, the Dutch playwright, has more than enough themes for his symphony in a minor key. He has developed them in a random and repetitive manner. Even with a steady and sincere Theater Guild production and artful performances which have a way of making mere nonsense vaguely arresting, this is a trying show, either as dramaturgy or straight theater.

* * *

Borrowing the standard cinematic trick of the flashback, the author presents a pair of scientists working in an Amsterdam dissecting laboratory on the eve of the Nazi invasion and then recalls the sad romance of the older doctor at the height of the Spanish civil war. It seems that he fell in love with a hopeless consumptive, who stayed alive when she should have been dead, held in some sort of tug of war between dissolution and the reproductive urge. If this sounds a little nutty, be advised that the elaborations on the subject, involving prophetic hallucinations, transmigration of souls, the death of a laboratory rat and a fatal kiss, really confuse whatever dramatic issue was in mind.

* * *

At best, "This Time Tomorrow" poses some provocative ideas. The discouragement of those who wish to heal in the face of imminent carnage comes through with considerable force in the performances of John Archer and Tyler Carpenter. The indomitable will to live which keeps the human engine running long after it is out of fuel is given striking and poignant statement in a beautiful portrayal of the doomed heroine by Ruth Ford. The cold, driving quest for scientific knowledge is realized in moments of wry humor as well as rather terrifying medical experimentation in Sam Jaffe's brilliant characterization of the older doctor in the flash-back scenes.

The players are on hand for a drama of far more consequence than this De Hartog work. Miss Ford, in particular, handles an extremely difficult role with startling conviction. Her visions may be mystical to the point of mumbo-jumbo, but she holds a pathetic character in clear outline through some of the dullest jargon in the piece. Paul Crabtree has directed the seven smoothly shifting scenes of the work with considerable imagination, and Herbert Brodkin has devised effective settings for the action. "This Time Tomorrow" has an undertow of significant dramatic meaning and feeling, but it is rarely observable on the surface of the proceedings at the Barrymore.

Daily Mirror

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

De Hartog's Play Is Soporific

By ROBERT COLEMAN

As of the present Jan de Hartog's "This Time Tomorrow" is our candidate for the dullest play of the year award. In it an absent-minded professor goes around hypnotizing a crazy-for-love girl to put her in a trance. Hypnotism was not necessary to get us into a coma.

The girl, as tubercular as Camille, had picked up a young scientist, fleeing from the professor's laboratory, on a ferry-boat and induced him to return to his work and duty. He and the professor were on the track of a cancer cure.

The girl wouldn't let the young scientist kiss her, though she'd caused several doctors to shoo her out of their lives, trying to kiss them. She thought she would die as soon as the right man kissed her.

The professor and his assistant soon learned from X-rays that their peculair guest should be dead, and the professor immediately deserted his laboratory experiments to hyptonize her and find out why she wasn't and what was in the great beyond.

The girl had visions every so often. She told the young scientist he was going to die from an infection, the professor that he would be hung during the Nazi invasion of Holland. And in a few dozen foggy words she revealed that the law of conservation applies to psychic as well as physical energy.

"This Time Tomorrow" is not really a terribly long play, but it lends the illusion of besting an uncut version of "Hamlet" by a couple of dozen cantos.

Sam Jaffe, as the screwball professor; Ruth Ford, as the nebulous nympho, and John Archer, as the intense scientist, bog down to their ears in murky mysticism, and director Paul Crabtree isn't able to help them very much.

We're puzzled as to just why the usually astute Theatre Guild thought "This Time Tomorrow" worth producing. Guild supervisors Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn must have found more in it than met our eyes and ears at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last night.

For us the de Hartog opus could have been titled "Positively No Exit." Anyway, now that the city fathers have banned the sale of sleeping tablets without a prescription, "This Time Tomorrow" should prove a boon for thrifty insomniacs.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

'This Time Tomorrow' Misses

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Theater Guild, which began its season by pondering Life in "Allegro," continued last evening by contemplating Death in "This Time Tomorrow." The newer offering is an odd mixture of mysticism, clinical detail, frankly hokey writing and effective performance.

It might do well as a hyperthyroid movie plot, but last evening at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre I felt that it was less than engrossing. Indeed, when Sam Jaffe was putting Ruth Ford in a trance by making her look at a candle, up there on the stage, he nearly got me, too, down here among the audience.

One is informed that the author, Jan de Hartog, is Dutch. Since no translator or adapter is credited in the program, it must be surmised that Mynheer de Hartog wrote the version of the play which we saw last evening—a version containing many sharp Americanisms which, in my ear, did not jibe with the setting of the drama, which is Amsterdam.

The first of seven scenes discloses two research physicians dissecting a rat in a laboratory, just before the Nazi invasion of Holland. "Weren't you ever in love?" asks the younger medic of the older. "Yes," is the essence of the reply, "but I killed her." And he acts his story in the flashback manner.

The Kiss of Death.

What follows is a scenario about the meeting of a hopelessly tubercular girl and a talented research physician; their falling in love; an interest in the girl's case on the part of a great, old physician who is called Chief; the girl's unworldly ability to see visions of the future—and visions, indeed, of the meaning of life and death.

The Chief is mainly interested in cancer research, but he finds the girl an interesting case, too, because, according to the X-rays of her lungs, she should have been stone cold dead a couple of weeks ago. He decides that love is what keeps her alive—nothing spiritual, but just a woman's mating instinct. If this instinct ever is appeased, the Chief is certain, the young woman will die forthwith. And she does, sure enough. The talented research physician with whom she is in love, and vice versa, literally kisses her to death.

Miss Ford Appealing.

As Ruth Ford, John Archer, Sam Jaffe and Tyler Carpenter perform "This Time Tomorrow," with some intelligent help from a promising new director named Paul Crabtree, things are not quite so silly as they sound in the three paragraphs just above.

As the girl who can see both death and the future, and who can hope only for a happier life at another time, Miss Ford is eloquently appealing. Mr. Jaffe applies good common sense to the playing of the Chief, and the home-grown fright wig with which he has been adorned for so many years is powdered a becoming gray. Mr. Archer is about as good a Dutch research physician as a healthy and handsome young American can be, I guess.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

Play About Scientists No Guild Triumph

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

We who have been beseeching the Illustrious Theatre Guild to stop doing popular musical shows for a while and return to the more earnest things of the drama got our wish last night, and it should certainly be a lesson to us to keep our big mouths shut. Heeding our plea, the eminent organization presented at the Ethel Barrymore a play originally called "The Death of a Rat," by a new Dutch playwright named Jan de Hartog. The title has been changed to "This Time Tomorrow," but under any name it would be a misadventure in pompous tedium.

It seems a shame, because the new work has lofty and sincere ambitions, and dignity of purpose is something to be cherished in the theatre. "This Time Tomorrow" is all about laboratory scientists at work, experiments in the cure of cancer and the study of hypnotic phenomena, and the meaning of life and death. There is also something or other about the importance of pure science in a world torn by war and revolution. It is, as you can see, filled with very cerebral stuff, but I am afraid it is both hollow and pretentious. And extremely dull.

Although it studies a number of profound subjects, "This Time Tomorrow" is cagey about its answers. There are several scenes in which Sam Jaffe puts Ruth Ford into a hypnotic sleep so he can investigate her subconscious, and they may have had the effect of rendering me somnolent. But I gathered that, in Mr. de Hartog's opinion, there may or may not be life after death, there may or may not be an answer on earth concerning the future of mankind, and, while it is possible that love may keep a dying person alive, on the other hand it may not.

Endeavoring to get down to more explicit details, I should perhaps tell you that the new play begins in an Amsterdam dissecting room during a trial air-raid alarm just before the Nazi invasion, when an earnest young scientist injures himself by mistake during the excitement. That reminds him of how, on a boat on the Zuyder Zee one night, while he was brooding over the tragedy of Spain, he met and fell in love with a mysterious young woman, who was dying of tuberculosis and had spells in which she foresaw the future.

One of the things she foretold was that the earnest young scientist was going to die in just such an accident and that an older scientist, of a singularly unpleasant nature, was going to be hanged by the Nazis. A lot happens before those two violent offstage incidents, including a fight between the young man, who loves the girl and would spare her from his older colleague's prying, and the old man, who wants to probe the technique of the girl's trances. The translator as well as the author of the work may be responsible for the fact that the whole story is told dully and clumsily almost to the point of the absurd.

In fact, the finest thing that can be said about the acting of Miss Ford, Mr. Jaffe and John Archer, who plays the younger scientist, is that, despite all temptation, they keep from making the proceedings ridiculous. The direction, which is by Paul Crabtree, the young actor who was so fine in "The Iceman Cometh" last season, also deserves credit for keeping some very dubious scenes from being laughed at. Herbert Brodkin's sets are helpful, too, but "This Time Tomorrow" is no tribute to the Dutch theatre or to ours.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Tiresome Evening at the Barrymore.

There were some incredible goings-on last evening at the Barrymore. The play called "This Time Tomorrow," written by the Dutch dramatist, Jan de Hartog, and brought in by the Theater Guild, turns out to be a tangled and diffuse drama that should have been left in Westport.

"This Time Tomorrow" is not worth the Guild's time, or that of the four players who struggle through it. De Hartog has written more of a philosophical tract than he has a play, and it comes forth as something fairly interminable as the author, via the services of his director and his small cast, expresses himself on a great variety of subjects—cancer and tuberculosis, psychical research, politics, war, love, hate and immortality.

Realism, symbolism, hypnotism and theatrical flashbacks, plus the careful staging of Paul Crabtree, fail to make anything of the high-minded but pretentious drama that has found its way into the handsome playhouse in Forty-seventh street.

"This Time Tomorrow" begins and ends in the dissecting room of a scientific institute in Amsterdam prior to the Nazi invasion. The three principal characters are an aging scientist, who has devoted his life to cancer research; the young doctor who is his assistant, and a girl who is dying of tuberculosis. She is a creature of visions and hallucinations; she is given, by the author, extraordinary powers to foresee and foretell.

Scientifically, and if X-ray films have any meaning at all, she is dead. But she lives on by some strange force which, de Hartog tells us, is love. Or the mating instinct. Anyway, instant death comes to her when she satisfies her yearnings by yielding to the young doctor's kiss. And he is not to live on without her. She foresaw his doom in one of her visions and it comes about just as she predicted.

The four players of the Theater Guild's cast—Sam Jaffe as the fusty, crochety, caustic professor; John Archer, as an eager and idealistic scientist; Ruth Ford as the tuberculosis victim of the vast prescience, and Tyler Carpenter as another doctor engaged in research—go about their work with commendable restraint and thus save "This Time Tomorrow" from seeming as ridiculous as "The Blue Flame" (Theda Bara vehicle) once did.

Archer is a compelling actor and Miss Ford is an intelligent and skillful actress; they are both given some terrifying things to do and say upon the Barrymore's stage. If they were any less adroit, de Hartog's tract might come forth as hilarious burlesque. Scenic designers usually show themselves to advantage under the most harrowing circumstances, and Herbert Brodkin, who designed the settings, does well by his craft.

"This Time Tomorrow" is cluttered, clinical and tiresome. The Guild misses with this one.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

Play Tries to Solve Mysteries of Life

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Somewhere deep beneath the general confusion of "This Time Tomorrow" there seems to be a rather heartening thought on immortality. It applies equally to life, love and science.

To be more specific is difficult, except that the play implies they all go on contributing to a large whole that will bring mankind to God.

This theory is volunteered by a young lady who is scientifically dead according to her X-rays. Her doctor explains that the urge to procreate holds off the death force.

Flashes of Second Sight.

If his assistant, who loves her, kisses her she will die. The girl has hallucinations into the future which the scientist identifies with the flashes of second sight that sometimes occur just before a normal death.

He is convinced that the girl can explain away the fear of death because she is so close to being completely dead. He wants to experiment on her psychically, as coldly as he would use a scalpel on the rats in his laboratory.

The struggle is between the older man's impersonal curiosity and the younger man's passionate love.

This is an interesting enough equation that might not be as fantastic as it first sounds. Unfortunately it is developed in a way that utterly exhausts a listener who tries to follow the theoristic threads.

Worries Ideas to Death.

The play worries to death every idea it proposes. It backs and fills, makes false starts and runs around in circles. It is deliberately gruesome and often vulgar in an attempt to reveal a dispassionate scientific attitude.

Attempts at vernacular are commonplace distractions. Illustrative of its queasy mood is the fact that its biggest laugh comes when the scientist remarks that he is going to be hanged by the Germans.

The oddest of attitudes are as-

sumed by the characters in this story. When the girl expresses a desire for a state where emotions are traced home instead of indulged in, her lover decides that she has achieved an ultimate clarity which must herald death.

The Fatal Kiss.

To keep her from hearing that an experiment she predicted has failed, he kisses her, knowing it will kill her.

The story is told by flashbacks which suggest the repeating chain of lives and work that the girl's vision has foretold. The young assistant, now a laboratory chief in his own right, is about to die as she predicted some years earlier. He is able, as she did for him, to prevent his own assistant from deserting their long job of research.

None of the acting penetrates very deeply into personality. But the script and the direction have offered the characters no more than obvious and typical outlines.

Familiar Ground.

Sam Jaffe seems on completely familiar if none too fertile ground as the older scientist, and John Archer is sincerely confused as his assistant, maturing believably for the later scenes.

Ruth Ford is to be commended for playing with candor a role that could be used as a final examination of the toughest drama school. She is bitter, lustful, sad and mystic by turn. She is hypnotized and shocked, and stares into candles and mirrors to read visions; she faints and she dies.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

Jan de Hartog's 'This Time Tomorrow' Put On by the Theatre Guild at the Barrymore

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In "This Time Tomorrow," Jan de Hartog is wrestling with something profound. Under the protection of the Theatre Guild, four very earnest actors gave it a thoughtful performance at the Ethel Barrymore last evening. But your inquiring reporter, aided by a dynamic advisor in the adjoining seat, does not know exactly what Mr. de Hartog is driving at, unless he is assuring the Gotham theatregoer that there is no death and that mankind is immortal.

That may very well turn out to be the case, since quite a number of prophets have said so emphatically. And if nothing has killed mankind yet, despite certain concerted adventures in that direction, there is reason to conclude that it will go on indefinitely, although forever does seem like too long a time.

* * *

Perhaps Mr. de Hartog stands in need of assurance. A Hollander, he went through some shattering experiences during the war and he is native to a country that has been wrecked and ravaged and that has looked into the eyes of death. Instead of seceding from society like Jean-Paul Sartre and the Existentialists, Mr. de Hartog seems to be making the great affirmation, which is at least positive and a token of health.

His central character is a girl who is scientifically dead but inexplicably alive. From the medical point of view, her tuberculosis has gone beyond the point where a person can still be living. A philosophical doctor naturally concludes that some force beyond life is sustaining her. Since she has hallucinations, he analyzes them in an effort to discover the nature of the force that still animates her. It is like listening to an echo of life beyond death, if that is not too technical.

* * *

The experiment is mixed up with the mumbo-jumbo of the research laboratory, and involves going backwards and forwards in time. There seems also to be some portentous symbolism involved. The doctor believes that the patient is kept alive by love and that she will die when her love is satisfied. As a matter of cold fact, she does die when her lover kisses her for the first time, which seems to prove that the doctor is a good scientist. Let us hope that the Theatre Guild subscribers do not take this too literally. A second generation of Theatre Guild subscribers is desirable.

* * *

As a writer Mr. de Hartog is heavy-handed, tortuous and lean. Although his play is uplifting, it is dull. But it does have the happy virtue of bringing Sam Jaffe back to the theatre with a becoming beard and attractive performance. As the chief doctor in Mr. de Hartog's metaphysical dispensary, Mr. Jaffe is giving his best performance since "Grand Hotel." Ruth Ford has had the fortitude to accept an unpalatable role that requires an unappetizing make-up, but she plays the dying swan intelligently. John Archer plays the frustrated swain pleasantly enough, and Tyler Carpenter gives a highly satisfactory performance as a sanitary laboratory assistant.

As director, Paul Crabtree has arranged a competent performance. Herbert Brodkin has provided settings that catch at least three of the chief moods of the play. But for all his earnestness, Mr. de Hartog is not an inspiring savant, and one hesitates to accept his reassurances about immortality as final. The Transcendentalists, unschooled in laboratory science, had more splendor in their vocabularies, and their visions were more vaulting. "This Time Tomorrow" sorely needs a poet.

PM

NOVEMBER 5, 1947

Kronenberger

A High-Flying Drama That Falls With a Thud

This Time Tomorrow is an exceedingly solemn piece of writing, which strikes me as the bunk. I am obliged to confess that I don't understand what it means. But as it is quite incredible in any straightforward sense, and quite unintelligible in any symbolic sense, and badly written (or translated) in any literary sense, and infernally dull in any dramatic sense, I think we can condemn it on circumstantial evidence—which, if I'm not mistaken, is evidence of the very best kind.

A further reason for suspecting that *This Time Tomorrow* means practically nothing is that it has a go at practically everything. In its high cosmic kitchen-sink fashion, it introduces rats and reproductive urges, hypnotism and hallucinations, tuberculosis and cancer, blackouts and thunderstorms, pure science and pure sex. So much apparatus would make even a good play topheavy. It makes a hollow one absurd.

* * *

The whole thing has to do with a young Dutch scientist who falls in love with a Hungarian girl dying of tuberculosis. In fact, the X-rays show that medically she is dead—and only still living because her will to reproduce is so powerful. She is also given to having visions about the future; and in addition to that, has discovered the nature of death. Hoping she will impart her discovery in a clear-cut way, the young scientist's chief proceeds to hypnotize her, but all the hypnosis reveals is that death is "two mirrors."

The chief and the younger scientist become pretty much at loggerheads over how to keep the girl, now that she is actually dead, from dying. The older man takes a purely scientific, the younger man a partly sexual view of the matter; and apparently the older man's is the sounder view. For when at last the younger one kisses the girl, he apparently satisfies her reproductive urge (her demands would seem to be rather modest), and she immediately dies.

* * *

I trust I have made all this reasonably confusing, since if I haven't, I have given a quite inaccurate account of what goes on at the Ethel Barrymore. It is all very much in what W. S. Gilbert called the transcendental line, which is not my line, and which I am not sure is Mr. Hartog's either. In any case, it is even duller than it is dubious, and sprinkled with dialogue that it is hard to think of as conversation. It is performed—by Ruth Ford, John Archer and Sam Jaffe—quite as well as any one has a right to expect. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER.

"Trial Honeymoon"

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

A New Farce And Old Gags

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

Conrad S. Smith's "Trial Honeymoon," which Harry Rosen offered last night at the Royale, has some dialogue which ought to take the tea and crumpets right out of Noel Coward's mouth.

Readers of this paper have a right to know what's going on and if they they think they're going to get this review without samples of the Smith dialogue they're deluded. So here we go:

"I was never a bride," says a girl with a leer. "but always maid." Hot dog! "Let's go into the dark room," says another actor, "and see what develops." Boffo! Wait, now, there's more. "Why," says a gal, "he's just an All American drawback from Notre Dame." Or how about: "He only enlisted in the Army so he could be sent to the Virgin Islands." Or: "You better go back in the oven, you're not quite done yet." Or even: "What Boy Scout troop did you belong to?" "The Wolf Patrol," is the snappy answer.

"Trial Honeymoon" is full of a lot of funny comebacks like that. As to plot, it has to do with two kids who can't count up to three and thus get married a day ahead of the legal date. Of course, there's a housing shortage and they're all living in canvas tents, which they refer to as Las Vegas hotel bungalows. Bugsy Siegal ought to get up from where he's at and sue them.

There is also a domineering sister, a wisecracking corporal, who vanishes right out of the plot in the third act; a hardboiled girl friend and an actor who plays a playwright and smokes a pipe to prove it.

Through it all a pretty girl named Ellen Fenwick does what she can with something less than nothing and indicates that she might be more than all right in a decent role. Miss Fenwick has the toughest job, but the rest of her playmates deserve a little sympathy, too.

'TRIAL HONEYMOON.'

Play by Conrad S. Smith; directed by Edward Ludlum; scenery and costumes by Philip Kessler; lighting by Chester Manser; presented by Harry Rosen at the Royale Theater Monday evening, November 3, 1947. The cast:

Elsie	Mildred Munroe
Craig Deming	Joel Thomas
Linda Melton	Ellen Fenwick
George Willoughby	Jack Fletcher
Dr. Trumbull	Stapleton Kent
Bill Daniels	Ed Moroney
Irene Smith	Eileen Heckart
Fanny Willoughby	Helen Waters

SYNOPSIS—Act I: Bungalow No. 9, Hotel Del Rey, near Los Angeles, a June afternoon in 1946. Act II, Scene 1: The bungalow that evening. Scene 2: Later that evening. Act III: The next morning.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

Move Over 'Magic Touch' Here's 'Trial Honeymoon'

By VERNON RICE

"Trial Honeymoon" is the kind of play that never should have been written. If it were written, it never should have been read. If it were read, it should never have been produced. If it were produced, it should have never been produced in New York.

Well, the dirty work is done, for it has passed through play evolution and it was brought forth last night on the stage of the Royale by Harry Rosen. Conrad S. Smith is the first person on whom to place the responsibility, for he wrote the farce.

"Trial Honeymoon," in its own minor offensive way, has had quite a history. It was first produced this summer by Mr. Rosen at the Greenbush Theatre in Blauvelt, N. Y., where, reports have it, the citizens of that community were so titillated by it that the comedy had to be presented two more times before the season ended, so great were the demands for it.

What could have entranced Blauvelt in this bit of nonsense is hard to imagine. It isn't dirty enough to be shocking nor shocking enough to be dirty. It is just an amateurish bit of dramaturgy in its telling of the mishaps caused by the delay of a young couple's wedding. The boys of Blauvelt should be able to turn out something better in one of their back rooms.

Blauvelt's delight has turned out to be New York's sour apples.

In failures of this kind the only regrettable feature is the involvement of pleasant people. They are not shown to advantage, Heaven knows, but they are shown some place else besides agents' offices.

We refer especially to Ed Moroney, Eileen Heckart, Joel Thomas and Jack Fletcher.

Anyone wishing to see them had better get to the Royale by tonight. "Trial Honeymoon" won't be with us long.

Move over "Magic Touch." Here comes "Trial Honeymoon."

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

'Trial Honeymoon' Put On at Royale

With what blithe optimism some producers enter the Broadway arena! Or is it contempt? Certainly last September when "The Magic Touch" ventured to open the local season there were those who thought it was all for the best — nothing could be as bad after that. Last night's events at the Royale may not be worse, but what Producer Harry Rosen brought in under the title of "Trial Honeymoon" does give the earlier entrant quite a tussle for dubious honors, and Author Conrad S. Smith had better look elsewhere for models to emulate.

"Trial Honeymoon" is a dull, inept comedy about a couple who find on the morning of their wedding that they cannot marry because they haven't waited the necessary three days after getting their license. Rather than disappoint their guests, they decide to go through with a mock ceremony and complete the nuptials at the proper time. This, of course, means they have to wait till the following day and gives Mr. Smith a chance to load the situation with just about all the off-color cliche gags he can muster. Not to mention those others—one character, for instance, says "Were you ever presented at court?" and the reply, "Yes, and I won plenty of damages, too." That ought to give you an idea of what was going on at the Royale last night.

As for the players, perhaps it is kinder to simply say that Ellen Fenwick is an attractive bride; Jack Fletcher plays a sissy bridegroom, Eileen Heckart is the brassy friend of the bride and Helen Waters (a drama critic in real life) is the meddlesome sister. The program insists on giving Edward Ludlum credit for the direction and Philip Kessler credit for the scenery and costumes. The program also says that "Trial Honeymoon" was so enthusiastically received in its summer-theatre engagement that it had to return for two additional weeks. Take it back under that summer moon, Mr. Rosen!—L. F.

New York Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

A Farce, and How!

The new play which opened last night at the Royale is, quite definitely, a farce. Shuffling through a set of romantic complications among some inconsequential young people in a California hotel bungalow, "Trial Honeymoon" is one of those weak, contrived gag shows which look so much more awkward through the theater's magnifying glass than they do on double-feature programs or in air-wave form. With a formless, corny comedy premise; with prop characters strenuously acted by an unpracticed cast, and with direction that nudges the audience in the direction of dull, frequent honeymoon jokes, this Harry Rosen presentation has nothing to offer except a little nervous laughter.

* * *

The idea or, rather, the scaffolding of this Conrad S. Smith script is about an impending marriage between a sweet young model and a stuffy effeminate man. As is evident from the beginning, this union does not take place, and the play tells why not in a series of frenzied posings having to do with the California marriage laws, an overbearing sister and an incident in the top half of a double-decker bunk. Without either finesse or wit, this nonsense is no more exhilarating than a poor burlesque skit. The only instance of originality is an exchange of dialogue in which an aproned young man is asked "What are you doing?" and he answers "I'm baking a cake." The originality? Well, he really is doing just that—baking a cake.

The list of characters in this play includes a playwright who lets the heroine read a script which is "something different from that commercial stuff I've been writing"; a reverend who clasps his hands and smiles; a sergeant who calls his jeep Camille because she's dying of a cough; an Eve Arden type and a blonde maid. Some of the actors who take these parts are better than others, and that is almost all that can be said about them—except that one cannot find too much fault with their inability to make this burdensome material sparkle. The best that can be said for "Trial Honeymoon" as a whole is that it is not quite bad enough to be an amusing fiasco.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

'TRIAL HONEYMOON'

The summer theater, having drawn heavily on the former wares of Broadway in the hot weather months just past, sought last evening to reciprocate with something of its own. The offering, a feeble little farce called "Trial Honeymoon," was hardly a happy selection.

According to reports drifting down from up Nyack way, this work by Conrad S. Smith, a cartoonist turned playwright at 23, kept the customers wandering into the reconverted barn playhouse of Harry Rosen from under the warm rural skies for three weeks. Unfortunately the Royale Theater, scene of last night's premiere, is located in an area that is not exactly bucolic, and the caliber of the wind whipping through West 45th street was a sharp reminder that summer was long past. As a result "Trial Honeymoon," transferred to its new setting by Mr. Rosen, seemed merely silly, inept and dull.

In tackling the ancient bridal night mixup theme the author has displayed little in the way of comic invention. His characters—caricatures would better describe some of them—are stock ones; the gag lines and double entendre quips are mediocre; and the long stretches in which the players merely sit in a line, explain the plot, and exchange wisecracks blanket what slight hilarity Mr. Smith has managed to contrive. He has not even thought up a good reason why the weakling bridegroom, long tied to the apron strings of an older sister, should have gone through a mock wedding with his light of love on learning that his California marriage license would not be valid for twenty-four hours, and thus the entire business lacks plausibility from the start.

For the most part the actors are sunk by the script. Eileen Heckart, as the maid of honor, a pert advertising woman from New York, and Ed Moroney, as a gold bricking sergeant from a nearby army camp, do give a hint, however, that with first rate material they could be first rate too. Helen Waters, a Long Island drama critic, plays the domineering sister. She took to the stage, so the program says, "to augment her qualifications as a reviewer with some acting experience." I fear that "Trial Honeymoon" will not long detain her from her critical chores.

HERRICK BROWN.

Daily Mirror

NOVEMBER 4, 1947

Corn Is Mean in 'Trial Honeymoon'

By LEE MORTIMER.

I am an expert on these things. Having wasted the better part of my misspent life in basement deadfalls, upholstered ginmills and honky-tonk cabarets, I know every corny gag ever uttered by every nightclub emcee since Joe Miller first wrote the book.

Which makes me wonder where 24-year-old Conrad S. Smith, author of "Trial Honeymoon," which opened last night at the Royale Theatre, heard them. According to the program note this moppet was a draftsman in a plane factory and more recently a cartoonist for ad agencies, which is not the way you get friendly with bleached-blonde straight ladies and funny men with brewery breaths. Yet, if there's one stock snappy comeback omitted in this play, I failed to catch it.

Here's an example. The dame says **"If the expression on your face was a book, Boston would ban it."** Then she says, **"You're the kind who thinks all women are the same."**

The guy snaps back, **"Well, aren't they?"**

But this will kill you. She accuses him of being a pessimist. **"You think all girls are bad,"** she says. With no effort at all, he flips, **"No. I'm an optimist. I hope they are."**

I guess you get what I mean without more examples. If you can live through these classy punch lines, all telegraphed ahead to save you the trouble of thinking, you will, I am happy to say, be surprised by some really hilarious farce comedy which will roll you in the aisles.

This tale of a marriage that doesn't come off is out of the same drawer as the ancient gags. The beautiful model and the spoiled and proper young society gal have to wait a day because of a flaw in the license.

Not to disappoint their friends, they go through with a mock ceremony, and right there you know what's coming. The "husband" fights to keep from being seduced by his bride. The honeymoon cottage looks like the main concourse of Grand Central at 5 o'clock. Strangers wander in and out. And there's the usual mix-up of beds, and their occupants. This is, of course, a bedroom farce.

"Trial Honeymoon," finds more than the honeymoon on trial. It's the first Broadway attempt for the producer, Harry Rosen; for most of the cast, and for the author. Labor Day is two months past, but it's straw hat day on Broadway.

Among this produce from the tall grass are some fine specimens who may, some day, get blue ribbons. Ed Moroney, as the wolfish army sergeant is a natural comedian and will go places. Eileen Heckart clicks with the canned comedy provided for the distaff side, while Ellen Fenwick, as the ingenue who almost gets married, is a dead ringer for Barbara Stanwyck. In Helen Waters is an unusual character woman and Jack Fletcher, the priggish almost groom with the crew haircut, who also bakes cakes, makes you think you're right smack in the middle of Lexington Avenue.

If you want laughs and don't care where you get them, or how low you've got to dig, this is it.